

NUNATSIAQ ONLINE

NEWS: Nunavut October 06, 2011 - 10:54 am

Satellite malfunction shuts down communications across territory, North

Telesat estimates service should be restored by midnight ET

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(updated at 5:30 p.m.)

Northwestel says a malfunctioning satellite is the cause of a major communications disruption across Nunavut and much of Canada's North.

Northwestel spokeswoman Christiane Vaillancourt said that all communities that receive their long distance calling and data service through satellite – meaning all of Nunavut - have been affected by the outage, which started at 6:30 a.m. ET.

And that's shut off long distance calling, cell phone service, DSL-based internet and some television cable stations.

The outage has also closed some services in Nunavut communities today, such as automatic bank machines.

The problem stems from Telesat's Anik F2 satellite, which ended up turned in the wrong direction.

In an Oct. 6 release, Telesat said that it is in control of the satellite and "all indications are that it is healthy and can be returned to service."

But Telesat estimates that it will take until the end of the day to restore service.

Qiniq, Nunavut's broadband internet provider, said in an online release that "there is presently no voice, data, health, etc. communications coming in and out of the affected communities except by way of hand held satellite phones."

Nunavut premier Eva Aariak spoke to the territory on CBC radio earlier this afternoon, which continues to broadcast throughout the region.

Aariak asked communities to activate their community emergency response plans, while requesting that health centres and wildlife officers turn on their Iridium satellite phones.

But she also asked residents only to use their own satellite phones in the case of an emergency, so as not to jam the lines.

Nunavut RCMP also maintained contact with its detachments across the territory Thursday with satellite phones, said spokesperson Sgt. Greg Cox.

The outage shut down much of the commercial air travel throughout the region Thursday.

Canadian North spokeswoman Lisa Hicks said the airline cancelled all its Dash 8 flights for the day.

Canadian North's jet service to Iqaluit left Ottawa behind schedule Thursday morning, and landed in Iqaluit without incident.

Hicks said the communications outage has meant limited or no weather reporting and forecasting or communication with Nav Canada's Area Control Centres.

First Air's Chris Ferris said the airline cancelled all its scheduled flights to and from Nunavut Oct. 6, along with its flight to Kuujuaq.

"We still holding out for the flights scheduled for later in the day," he told *Nunatsiaq News*. "But we're looking for communications to be restored. To fly into a community where people don't have communication with each other, we didn't think that was prudent."

The airline was expected to schedule two flights from Ottawa on Oct. 7 to make up for the cancellation.

The outage has also impacted Nunavik, where residents cannot make long-distance calls.

Tamaani, the region's wireless internet provider, posted this statement on its Facebook page: "Right now in the north there is a satellite issue which will affect long distance phone service and may also affect other services. But Tamaani internet is not affected by this and is still running."

The communications breakdown comes just over a month after the release of a report called the Arctic Communications Infrastructure Assessment, compiled on behalf of a working group of public safety officials.

The report called Arctic Canada a "telecommunications backwater" and said that without a federal strategy to increase bandwidth and reduce costs, the North risks falling even further behind.

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